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TWO WEEKS IN DEPARTMENT STORES.¹

It is so common for those who purchase goods to think nothing at all about the clerk in attendance, or the conditions under which the goods were produced, that it seems timely just now, when the Consumers' League² has started upon a crusade of educating the public, to give a true picture of some conditions existing in Chicago.

The necessity for a thorough investigation of the work of women and children in the large department stores in the city was apparent, and the difficulties manifold. With a view to ascertaining some things which could be learned only from the inside, the investigation which is to form the subject-matter of this paper was undertaken. It seemed evident that valuable information could be obtained if someone were willing to endure the hardships of the saleswoman's life, and from personal experience be able to pass judgment upon observed conditions. The urgency of the need, coupled with an enthusiastic interest in the

¹ It should be distinctly stated that the two department stores in which the material for this paper was collected are not the establishments which have the best reputation of their class in Chicago.

² The Consumers' League of Illinois was organized by the collegiate alumnæ of this city in February, 1897, when a standard was adopted and a provisional constitution drawn up. A permanent organization, with Mrs. Charles Henrotin as president, was effected at a meeting held in Hull-House, November 30, 1898. The league at the present time has about eight hundred members.

work for which the Consumers' League stands, led me to join the ranks of the retail clerks for two weeks during the rush of the holiday trade. It may be urged that just judgments could not be formed at a time when conditions must be abnormal. It is true that conditions were abnormal, but the importance of knowing to what extent cannot be overestimated. The consumer should know how far his Christmas shopping works hardship for the clerks. Moreover, he should concern himself with the question as to whether the abnormal conditions he has helped to create are in part mitigated by adequate payment for the work exacted. The law in Illinois¹ prohibits the employment of children under fourteen years, and limits the working day of those between the ages of fourteen and sixteen to ten hours in manufacturing and mercantile establishments, and it should be a matter of concern to the purchaser if his persistence in late shopping leads the merchant to break, or at least evade, the law. It is admittedly a menace to the social weal to have children and young girls working late at night, and thus exposed to the dangers of city streets at a time when physical and moral safety demand that they be at home. One of the objects of this investigation was to find the amount of overtime exacted, and the compensation, if any, that was given. Employers are always ready to tell the best conditions that exist; it remains to others to find the worst. And the Consumers' League utterly refuses to indorse stores that do not live up to its standard all the time.

And yet some will argue that any effort in behalf of the employés in the great stores is unnecessary. Many objections were urged against factory legislation in the early days of that reform. The champions of the movement in England met with strenuous opposition, but finally their frightful revelations of actual conditions overcame their opponents, and a wave of enthusiastic reform set in. The history in this country is similar. From 1830 to 1874 agitation for the protection of women and children in the factories was kept up, till finally, at the latter date, the Massachusetts Act became a reality. Then other

¹ Child-labor law of Illinois, February, 1897.

states followed the example set, until, at the present time, almost all the states having large manufacturing interests have very good factory laws. Illinois is a notable exception.¹ Such, in a word, has been the history of the factory laws. We are just on the eve of an agitation for the amelioration of the conditions under which a vast army of saleswomen and cash children work. Thoughtful people all over the country have already recognized the necessity for this; but the whole body of the people must be awakened. And to help, in a small way, the educative movement here my labor was undertaken.

The difficulty of finding employment was not so great as might be supposed. Owing to the holiday rush, and the consequent need of large reinforcements to the original help, the employers were not insistent on experience as a requisite for the successful applicant. However, it was not until several visits had been made that I was promised a position at three dollars a week. Work was to begin the following Monday, which would give me just two weeks of the Christmas trade. Employment being promised, it seemed desirous to engage board in some home for working women; for the environment which such a place would provide gave promise of the best results. I was fortunate in finding a most satisfactory place not far from the heart of the city, and there I went as a working-woman. This home is deserving of more than passing mention. It provides board and lodging, together with the use of pleasant parlors and library, to working-women under thirty years of age for two dollars and a half a week, if they are content to occupy a single bed in a dormitory. These dormitories are thoughtfully planned, and accommodate from ten to fifteen each. A large proportion of the sixty-five residents were saleswomen, and they, in the course of conversation, gave me much useful information. All classes of girls were there, and most of them received very low wages. A few entries in the house register are here inserted to show the nature of the records kept, and the way in which the girls fill in the columns.

¹ The supreme court declared the law of 1893 unconstitutional.

Name	Age	Nationality	Occupation	Wages per week
	18	American	Saleslady	\$4.00
	27	Virginian	Stenographer	6.00
	24	American	Clerk	4.50
	23	American	Clerk	3.00
	29	German	Cashier	6.50
	23	Irish	Saleswoman	6.00
	28	American	Fur worker	5.00
	20	American	Saleslady	3.00

This, then, was the place from which I started out to work on the appointed Monday morning. The hurried breakfast, the rush out into the street thronged with a lunch-carrying humanity hastening to the down-town district, and the cars packed with pale-faced, sleepy-eyed men and women, made the working world seem very real. Hurrying workers filled the heart of the city; no one else was astir. I reached my destination promptly at eight, the time of opening. Then I had to stand in line at the manager's office awaiting my more definite appointment, which was received in due time. But the manager had changed his mind about wages, and said he would give me two dollars a week plus 5 per cent. commission on sales, instead of the regular salary he had mentioned in our former interview. I was then given a number, and by "424" I was known during my stay there. I was sent to the toy department, where I found sixty-seven others who were to be my companions in toil. The place was a dazzling array of all kinds of toys, from a monkey beating a drum to a doll that said "mamma," and a horse whose motor force was to be a small boy. Our business was first to dust and condense¹ the stock, and then to stand ready for customers. We all served in the double capacity of floorwalkers and clerks, and our business was to see that no one escaped without making a purchase. The confusion can be readily imagined. As soon as the elevators emptied themselves on the floor, there was one mad rush of clerks with a quickly spoken, "What would you like, madam?" or, "Something in toys, sir?" And the responses to these questions were indicative of the characters of the people making

¹ This meant to pile like things together in as small space as possible.

them. The majority were rude, some amused, and a few alarmed at the urgency of the clerks. One young boy, on being assailed by half a dozen at once, threw up his hands in horror, and said: "For God's sake, let me get out of here!" and fled down the stairs, not even waiting for the elevator. The cause of such watchful activity on the part of so many employés was the 5 per cent. commission which was to eke out the two or three dollars a week salary. Those who were experienced received the latter sum. And the extra nickels earned meant so much to many of them. Most of the girls in that department lived at home or with relatives, but in many cases the necessity for money was most urgent.

One of the difficult things at first was keeping track of the prices, for they were frequently changed during the day, and the penalty for selling under price was immediate discharge, while selling above price met with no disapproval.

Every morning there were special sales. Sometimes articles that had sold for one dollar would be reduced to ninety-eight cents, with much blowing of trumpets, while, again, twenty-five cent articles would be offered at a bargain for *forty cents* "today only." But we soon learned what things were to be "leaders" from day to day, and the manager's brief instructions each morning were sufficient to keep us posted on the bargains. The charms of the bargain counter vanish when one has been behind the scenes and learned something of its history. The humor of it seemed to impress the clerks, for often knowing winks would be exchanged when some unwary customer was being victimized.

Oh, the weariness of that first morning! The hours seemed days. "Can I possibly stand up all day?" was the thought uppermost in my mind, for I soon learned from my companions that abusive language was the share of the one who was found sitting down. Later in the week I found this to be true. One of the girls who was well-nigh exhausted sat a moment on a little table that was for sale—there was not a seat of any kind in the room, and the only way one could get a moment's rest was to sit on the children's furniture that was for sale on one part of

the floor. The manager came along and found the poor girl resting. The only sympathy he manifested was to call out in rough tones : "Get up out of that, you lazy huzzy, I don't pay you to sit around all day!" Under such circumstances it is small wonder that the stolen rests were few. By night the men as well as the women were limping wearily across the floor, and many sales were made under positive physical agony.

How well I remember my first service there! The people were slow in coming that morning; in fact, they were every morning. We scarcely ever had any business worth mentioning till eleven o'clock, and the greatest rush came about six. From half-past twelve to two was a busy time also. People seemed determined to shop when we ought to be getting our meals. My first two customers were of a type that abounds. First an angular woman with a business-like expression came to me and in peremptory tones demanded that I show her building blocks. They were dutifully shown, but proved unsatisfactory. Then dolls' buggies, boys' sleds, laundry sets, and skates were examined in slow succession, and I was catechized in a thoroughly pedagogical manner regarding the prices and merits of the same. When the last skate had been critically examined, she fixed a patronizing gaze upon me and said : "I do not intend to buy today ; I merely wished to examine your goods." "Was she a revenue officer?" was the first thought that came to my mind. Oh, no! in the language of the shop, she was only a "rubber-neck." I afterward estimated the distance walked with her, and found it to be about one-twelfth of a mile, and still I had not a sale on my book. She took half an hour of my time.

The next customer who fell to my lot was a man of vinegary mien who wanted a boy's sled at a cost of one dollar and a half. Now, we had none at that particular price, but we had them at one dollar and thirty-five, and one dollar and sixty-five cents, either of which I thought would suit him. But I was mistaken, for he turned upon me a look of utter scorn, and then proceeded to denounce me for advertising things we did not have in stock. I meekly suggested that I was not responsible for the advertisements which appeared in the morning papers, but he was not at

all mollified, and left in high dudgeon. I felt rather blue, but the comforting voice of a little cash girl said: "Don't yer mind him, he's only a cheap skate." Thus reassured I started out on another venture. This time it was a small boy who wanted to buy, and the bright-faced little fellow did me good. He had eighty cents, he said, and he wanted presents for the baby, and Tom, and Freda, and cousin Jack, and several others. I suggested one thing after another, till finally he had spent his money; so I made out my first check and looked at it with pride. It read thus:

X. Y. Z. HOUSE.					
SOLD BY					AM'T REC'D
424					.80
1	"Dewey" bank	-	-	-	05
2	Sets dishes	-	-	-	30
1	Laundry set	-	-	-	15
1	Mother Goose ladder	-	-	-	12
1	Rubber ball	-	-	-	10
2	Bb'ls clothespins	-	-	-	08
					80
CASH NO.					AMOUNT
127					.80
					.80

The boy was happy, and so was I. I looked admiringly at the eighty cents set down on my index sheet. It meant that I had earned four cents. After that the sales came frequently. They were all small, of course, and amounted to only \$14.98 for the day. But this was more than I sold any succeeding day. It has often been noticed that new clerks do better at first than they do later. With me, freshness and interest in the novelty helped to banish weariness and invite sales.

My first day ended at half-past six. Through some oversight, a supper ticket was not given to me, and so I was allowed to go home. I went wearily to the cloak-room and more wearily to my boarding place. When I arrived there, I could only throw myself upon my little white cot in the dormitory and wildly wonder if it would be all right for a working girl to cry. Presently I was dreaming that blows from an iron mallet were falling fast upon me; and in a little while it was morning, and another day was begun. Hundreds of clerks in the city were starting out for work just as weary as I, but with them there was not the knowledge that labor could be ended at will.

It must be understood that "our house" was open every evening till about ten o'clock, and the only compensation given for the extra work was a supper, the market value of which was about fifteen cents. That, like the lunch, had to be eaten in great haste. The maximum time allowed, in either case, was thirty minutes, but our instructions were to "hurry back." That half an hour was wholly inadequate one can readily imagine. It sometimes took ten or fifteen minutes to get a simple order filled in the crowded restaurants near by. The lunch outside meant from ten to fifteen cents a day out of our small earnings, but the breath of even the smoky outdoor air was worth that to us. The air inside was always foul, and the continual noise was fairly maddening. We were obliged to eat our supper in the store, where it was provided. The second day I partook of what the management magnanimously called the "free supper." We were fed in droves and hurried away before the last mouthful was swallowed. The menu consisted of a meat dinner and an oyster stew, the latter of which I always elected with the lingering hope that it had not been made of scraps left from the regular café dinner earlier in the day. The said stew consisted of a bowl of hot milk, in the bottom of which lurked *three* oysters, except on that memorable day when I found *four*.

The days in the store were much the same, with their endless fatigue. At times the rush would be great; then again we would have nothing to do but stand around and talk. Thus we became surprisingly well acquainted in a short time. We talked about

our wages and compared index sheets on every possible occasion. Some sold very little and at the end of the week had no more than three dollars.¹ The mental anguish of some of the girls when they saw at night how small their sales had been is impossible to describe. One may elect to become a worker, and endure the hardships of the toil, and live the life of the laborer, and receive the same starvation wages, but he can never experience the abject wretchedness of not knowing where to turn when the last dollar is gone. Three dollars a week to a girl alone in the city means starvation or shame.

The fourth day of the week was one I remember well. There had been special sales the day before, and everyone was more tired than usual; consequently those in charge were more than usually harsh and discourteous. One girl was ill. She should not have left home, but she feared losing her place if she remained away. She found after an hour or two that she could not work, so she asked permission to go home. The answer given was that she need not return if she left then. The floorwalker, who had a spark of humanity in his breast, told her that she could go to the toilet-room to lie down, if she would come out to her place once in a while to show that she was there. That poor girl spent the day on the rough, dirty floor, with a cash girl's apron for a pillow. At intervals she dragged herself out to her place in the department, only to crawl back more wretched than before. We wondered sometimes why there was no large chair or couch provided for an emergency case of that kind. There were comforts in the customers' waiting-rooms, but discharge was the fate of the employé who dared go in there.

A shop girl might die on the bare, hard floor, while easy chairs and couches in another room were unoccupied. Surely it would not be unreasonable to require that suitable rest-rooms be provided for the employés. Undue advantage could not well be taken of such a thing, for we could not leave the floor without asking the floorwalker—a man—for a pass, and his injunc-

¹ On Saturday night all those whose sales averaged less than five dollars a day were discharged.

tion always was, "Don't stay long." The unpleasantness of asking for a pass was sometimes overcome by girls slipping away in the crowd without permission. We thought some woman might be commissioned to grant such requests. We had to endure so many unnecessary hardships.

The cloak-, toilet-, and lunch-rooms were the gloomiest and filthiest it was ever my misfortune to enter. The cobwebs and dirt-besmeared floors looked "spooky" under the flickering glare of insufficient gaslight. The only ventilation came through a foul basement, and there the little girl attendants stayed all day and late into the night. And that was where the girls who brought lunches had to eat them. A few rough board tables and chairs in a more or less advanced state of ruin were provided, and scores of hungry girls sat around and ate lunches from newspaper parcels and drank coffee from tin cans.¹ It was not a healthful atmosphere, either physically or morally, and yet it was typical of the poorer class of stores. The slang of the streets, interspersed with oaths, formed the staple medium of communication. A young and innocent newcomer could not fail to feel shocked at what she heard. But the surroundings were not conducive of elevated thoughts. Refinement of thought and speech would soon disappear in such an environment. I never saw a clean towel in the toilet-room. Several hundred pairs of hands were wiped on the coarse, filthy piece of crash each day, and there was no woman in attendance to see that things were kept in a sanitary condition. Two little girls were in the cloak-room, but they had nothing to do with the adjoining places. The rooms were merely narrow hallways. The wretchedness of all these appointments was forced upon me the day my fellow-worker was so ill. It was so hard to get our wraps at night, for then all the employés were there pushing their way to the front. One night a young girl in the line was rather restless, and one of the store officials charged her with crowding, and jerked her out of line so that she struck against a counter on the right. He then shoved her back with such force that she fell against another on the left. She was badly hurt, and the

¹ Coffee was supplied to employés at the rate of two cups for five cents.

uproar which followed was mob-like in its intensity. The boys were going to shoot the offender, they said, but he only smiled, secure in the justness of his attack. The case was afterward reported to the managers, but no reparation was ever made. The girl was unable to work the next day on account of the soreness of her back. In addition to the physical discomfort she had to endure, she lost a day's wages. From that warlike atmosphere we went forth into the night, and many of us had to go alone. That night I felt timid; so I asked if anyone was going my way. A little cash girl of only thirteen years spoke up and said: "I'll go wid yez." She had eight blocks to walk after she left me. The only mitigating circumstance was her total lack of fear. She was used to sights and sounds to which I was a stranger. There were always men on the street corners ready to speak to a girl alone, and one hesitating step meant danger. Almost every morning the girls had some story to tell of encounters with men of that class; and that they were not exaggerating was proved satisfactorily to me by an experience of my own. I stepped from the car one night after midnight, and soon found that I was being followed. The chase continued for two blocks, when I staggered breathless into my doorway, with my pursuer not five feet away. My terror had given me power to outrun him.¹

I always pitied the cash children. Many of them were too young to be working, but the sin was at their parents' door. They placed on file the required affidavits,² and the employer asked no questions. One little girl confessed to me that she was *not quite twelve years old*, but she told me not to tell anyone, because her mother told her to say she was fourteen. This burst of childish confidence came when I was pitying her because she had the toothache. The poor little things always had the toothache. There seems to be something about enforced work that brings on that malady in a child! But their trouble was probably more real than imagined. They often carried

¹ This happened during my second week.

² The child-labor law of this state requires all children under sixteen to file affidavits sworn to before a notary public.

some cheap candy in one apron pocket and a little vial of tooth-ache drops in the other, but they thought of no relationship existing between the two. The little girls frequently responded to the cry of, "Cash! Here cash!" with tears streaming down their faces; and the cause was always the one just mentioned, or sore feet. They got tired, of course. They were only children, and the instinct for play was strong. They would kiss the dolls and trundle the carts they were taking to the wrapping-room. A change of any kind was hailed with delight, as for instance the "running" of a C. O. D. check, which occasioned a trip to another floor. The added labor entailed was not considered. There were a great many extra ones employed at that time, and there was a continual war between the regulars and extras. The latter were engaged every morning at thirty-three cents a day, while the former were paid two dollars a week. The "enunciator," or one who had charge of the others, received two dollars and a half a week. In that particular store the little girls looked down on the boys, of whom there were comparatively few. The latter were supposed to clear away rubbish from under the counters, and on one occasion, when no boy was in sight, the floorwalker told a girl to carry away some waste papers, and she replied with a toss of her head: "You bloke you, I ain't no cash boy!" Childlike, they had their favorites among the clerks, and the fortunes of those they watched with much interest. One day the manager of the store appeared on our floor, and in ringing tones called out "424!" As I was starting to answer the summons, my young friend threw her arms around me and said: "Don't you mind Tom Jones,¹ he can't hurt you. Tell him you're a new girl, if he scolds you; and if he's ugly, tell him to go to h—." I did not do any of those things, and I got away unhurt. He had no grievance against me, but he had such a rude way of addressing the clerks that they were all afraid of him.

We had our troubles with the manager and other officials, but they were not all. Some of the customers were so hard to

¹This was the way the manager was spoken of by everybody. The name here is fictitious.

please and so uncivil; and they made us feel like criminals because of our inability to do what apparently could not be done. Then there was the well-meaning buyer who persisted in asking us how much wages we got. Just why saleswomen should be subjected to such rudeness by seemingly intelligent people is difficult to see. One rather independent girl, on being asked this question for the fifth time one day, replied that she got ten dollars a week, and added: "How much do you get?" The questioner was a gentleman of clerical appearance, and he replied: "My dear young woman, I am afraid your surroundings are corrupting your good manners!" Then he passed on, doubtless feeling very righteous over his reproof.

On the whole, the week there passed quickly, and on Saturday night I decided to leave and try my fortune elsewhere. I thought that one week each in two stores would be better than the whole time spent in one. I told the manager that I wanted my pay because I was going to leave. He was rather abusive and said: "What do you want to leave for? You are making good money; you girls want the earth." I left that night with my two dollars in my pocket; my commission could not be obtained till the following week. Wages are always paid weekly there.

I was "out of a job," and trusted to luck to find another.

Sunday in the home was a quiet day. Everybody was tired and discouraged. There had been extra work, but no extra pay, and there were so many Christmas things to be bought. Sunday had to be the general mending day, and that day many were making little gifts for the friends at home. Most of the girls were sensible about dress, and they guarded their small earnings carefully. I guided my expenditure by theirs and kept an accurate account of my expenses for the week. The items are here presented:

Board for one week	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$2.50
Car fare, 6 days, ¹ @ 10c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.60
Lunch, 5 days, @ 15c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.75
" 1 day, @ 10c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.10

¹ Many of the girls walked as far as two miles to save car fare.

For charity dinner ¹	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.13
Paper, 3 nights	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.06
Postal cards	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.05
Candy ²	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.10
Stamps	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.10
Oranges ²	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.09
Present for table girl	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.05
“ “ matron	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.10
Laundry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.16
Total expense	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<hr/> \$4.79

What I earned for the week was as follows :

Wages	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$2.00
Commission	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<hr/> 3.25
									\$5.25
Less fines ³	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<hr/> 30
Total earnings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	<hr/> \$4.95

Thus I had a balance of sixteen cents after my bills were paid, and that was as much as many had. At that rate it would take a long time to earn enough to buy a pair of boots.

The next week I started out again to look for a place, and I found one where I most wished to work. When I first sought employment I was an unskilled laborer, but the next time I was an experienced saleswoman, and as such I was engaged at a salary of four dollars a week plus 1 per cent. commission on sales. This time my work was selling dolls, and there were four of us at the one counter. I realized at once that this was a much better place than the first one. The managers and floorwalkers were gentlemanly and kind, and the work was carried on in a thoroughly business-like way. I breathed freely when I found that no one would swear at me. There it was no crime to sit down, and behind each counter could be found one or two little boxes which the girls used for seats. They were awkward things,

¹ The matron asked for contributions from two cents up. Every girl in the home responded.

² These articles were for a "treat."

³ A fine of ten cents was imposed for each tardiness, unless over half an hour; then twenty-five cents was charged.

though, and very much in the way when we were moving around, waiting on customers. A hinged seat that could be swung under the counter would be such a boon.

The hours were very long. We worked from eight in the morning till eleven at night, with the exception of Christmas eve, when we worked until twelve. Half an hour was the time allowed for each meal. The only extra pay given was thirty cents each night for supper money. There was a very good cheap restaurant in the store, and there we bought our suppers for from twenty to thirty cents. Many of the clerks ate two cold lunches a day in order to save the money, while others were quite reckless and bought what they considered dainties. One day a girl who had a very bad headache went to lunch with me, and this is what she ordered :

Plum pudding with wine sauce	-	-	-	-	-	\$0.10
Swiss cheese sandwiches	-	-	-	-	-	.05
Chocolate ice cream	-	-	-	-	-	.05
Strong coffee	-	-	-	-	-	.05

My astonishment was too great for words.

The work in this store was in many ways not so difficult as in the first. Our work was confined to one counter, and then we could sit down for a moment once in a while ; but the customers were just as hard to suit and equally regardless of our feelings. And how long the days were ! It seemed to me that my thoughts were always centered on my feet ! Our arms got tired, too ; we had to reach a good deal for stock. A man made me open and take the dolls from nineteen boxes to see if I could not find him one with black eyes and yellow hair. I told him they were all gone, at the price he desired, but he wanted me to verify my statement. As if it would matter to his two-year-old baby whether the doll had black or green eyes ! He was evidently buying one for his own delectation. That is only one instance of the many exacting customers we met.

There the sanitary conditions were good, lunch- and cloak-room accommodation ample, and the treatment kind and courteous ; but the wages were woefully insufficient. From four

to five dollars a week was the average. The commission given was only temporary, and designed to give an extra impetus to the sale of the holiday goods. One girl who had worked there for seven years told me that she had never received more than five dollars a week; and she had to keep up a respectable appearance. It was an openly acknowledged fact among the girls there that the paths of dishonor were traversed to supplement their small incomes. Some of them did not hesitate to advise newcomers of this lucrative employment. They viewed the matter solely from a commercial standpoint, and justified their conduct by the urgency of the need. The girls themselves said that more than a third of them were leading lives of shame. It was common to hear such expressions as this uttered in agonized seriousness: "If I don't get more wages I'll have to go bad. But I'd hate to disgrace my family." Lecherous men were always around ready to offer aid. They came, professedly, to buy, but it was not the wares of the store they wanted. The young and pretty girls yielded most easily. They would weep, sometimes, and say: "Good people look down on us. But they don't know—they don't know. *We have to earn our living.*"

Surely any effort which is being made to bring the saleswoman's wages up to a point where she can live without the wages of sin is worthy of the most respectful consideration. Whatever is done in this direction is manifestly a social good. And, moreover, the best interests of society demand that thinking people should consider this matter seriously. All the hardships of the shop girl's life fade into insignificance before this grave danger she has to face. Adequate support is the first necessity. Improved sanitary conditions and opportunity for rest may well take a second place. They can be secured by legislation; the other must come from united action on the part of the buyers, and the organization of the saleswomen themselves. The trades-union spirit should be fostered, and the working-women taught the power of united effort.

Many merchants in this city do give living wages, but there are others who do not. I know from actual experience, and I know from reliable testimony.

My earnings for the first week have already been presented, and those of the second are here given :

Salary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$4.00
Commission on sales	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.53
Supper money	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.80
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$7.33
Less fines ¹	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40
Week's wages	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$6.93

My expenses for the week were as given below :

Board	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$2.50
Car fare, 6 days, @ 10c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	60
Lunch, 4 days, @ 15c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	60
“ 2 days, @ 10c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Supper, 6 days, @ 25c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.50
Paper, 3 days, @ 2c.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	06
Stamps	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	04
Toy dog for cook's baby	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
Bananas ²	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Witch hazel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Chewing gum ³	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	06
Laundry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
										\$6.05

Thus my balance was eighty-eight cents. One girl at the home had only two cents left when her bills were paid. And she it was who said in answer to someone's expressed wish one night that “tomorrow would be Sunday”: “I wish there wouldn't be any tomorrow.” So many times they were overcome by the utter hopelessness of the future. They have to grapple with the wages problem in a most practical way.

It is true that the present rate of women's wages has been brought about by forces over which the public has or can have but little control ; yet it is equally true that a conscientious investigation of the whole subject in this city could not be value-

¹ These were unavoidable owing to the crowds of employes using the elevators, and the shortness of the time allowed for meals.

² For a “treat.”

³ This investment was to enable me to respond affirmatively to the oft-repeated question : “Got any chewin's on you ?”

less. While it is impossible to improve matters at once, or perhaps ever, it is yet certainly worthy of an attempt. That women in other vocations may be in dire straits does not preclude the legitimacy of centering public efforts on one occupation.

In the two weeks I was employed I worked one hundred and seventy-five hours and received eleven dollars and eighty-eight cents, or a little more than six cents an hour. Under normal conditions the hours would be about one hundred and twenty for the same length of time. This, of course, would be exclusive of Sunday work, which is required all the year, at least in some stores. A certain number of clerks are needed for two or more hours during the day. In my first place no remuneration of any kind was given for this; in the second, car fare was always given, and lunch if the duties did not end before noon. The cash children in those two stores earned three and one-third cents an hour. When kept overtime, as they were in the first store in which I worked, they earned not quite two and one-third cents an hour. It must be said, however, that the managers did not insist upon children who worked at night being there promptly at eight in the morning. Sometimes they did not go until nine.

I am going to present just here in tabulated form some information I gathered from my fellow-workers regarding themselves. The statements are made for the month of December, and refer only to employés in the big down-town stores. In some cases I have had a dozen or more names followed by identical information, so I have inserted in the table but one to serve as a type. As a rule the working-women object to telling the wages they receive, particularly if they are low. They like to give the impression that they receive much more than they do, and this, I suppose, is not characteristic of any one particular class in society. Any figures based on a canvass made from the outside are almost sure to be misleading. The cases here cited have been carefully examined, and from intimate acquaintance with the individuals I believe them to be correct :

Name	Employment	Hours A.M. P.M.	Overtime	Weekly wage	For extra work	Cost of living per week	Conjugal condition	Health	Remarks
A.....	saleswoman	8:00-6:00	none	\$ 6.00		\$2.50	single	fair	
B.....	"	8:00-6:30	evenings till 10	3.00		2.50	"	"	same place 3 years
C.....	"	8:00-6:00	none	5.00		3.00	"	"	
D.....	inspector	8:00-6:30	till 10 or 11 P.M.	3.50		lived home	"	bad	
E.....	wrapper	8:00-6:00	till 7 sometimes	4.00		"	"	fair	
F.....	buyer	8:00-6:00	none	10.00		\$4.75	separated	bad	
G.....	enunciator	8:00-6:30	till 10 or 11	2.50	supper	lived home	single	good	
H.....	saleswoman	8:00-6:30	"	3.50	"	\$2.50	married	fair	
I.....	cashier	8:00-6:30	"	6.50	50c per week	3.00	single	"	
J.....	saleswoman	8:00-6:30	till 11	3.00		2.50	married	"	husband and 4 children
K.....	"	8:00-6:00	till 10	5.00	35c for supper	lived home	widow	good	one child
L.....	cash girl	9:30-4:30	none	3.25		"	single	"	
M.....	saleswoman	8:00-6:30	evenings	5% commission	supper	"	"	fair	
N.....	cash girl	8:00-6:30	"	\$2.00	"	"	"	"	
O.....	saleswoman	8:00-6:30	"	\$2.00+5% com.	"	\$2.50	"	good	
P.....	"	8:00-6:30	"	\$3.00	cup of coffee	2.50	"	"	
Q.....	sewer	8:30-5:30	none	6.50		2.50	widow	"	one child
R.....	saleswoman	8:00-6:00	evenings	5.00	30c for supper	2.50	single	fair	same place 7 years
S.....	cash girl	8:00-6:00	none	2.00		lived home	"	"	
T.....	inspector	8:00-6:00	evenings	2.50	30c for supper	"	"	"	
U.....	saleswoman	8:00-6:00	"	\$4.50+1% com.	"	\$1.50 at home	"	bad	mother to help
V.....	"	8:00-6:00	"	4.00+1% com.	"	\$2.50	"	fair	
W.....	"	8:00-6:30	"	2.00+5% com.	supper	\$2.00 at home	"	"	
X.....	shirt-maker	8:00-6:00	none	40 $\frac{3}{4}$ c per doz.		lived home	married	bad	husband had no work
Y.....	wrapper-maker	8:00-6:00	"	12 $\frac{1}{2}$ c each		"	single	fair	" ill; 2 children
Z.....	saleswoman	8:30-5:30	"	\$7.00		\$3.75		good	

The organization that is attempting to mitigate the evils connected with life in mercantile establishments has most laudable aims and methods. The ameliorative movement on the part of consumers is a rational one. It is representative of the most enlightened forces in society, and rests on a sound basis. So long as the consumer will patronize bad stores, so long will they exist; so long as people will buy clothing produced under inhuman conditions, so long will they continue to be produced under just those conditions. Has the public no duty in the matter? Women and children are in the industrial world, and it is useless to wrangle over the expediency of their filling the places they do. They are there, and as the weaker members of society they need protection. Inhuman and demoralizing conditions must be removed. Some of the evils here could be speedily remedied by legislation and faithful inspection. Those who have not already considered the matter would do well to peruse carefully the Consumers' standard of a fair house, and ask themselves whether or not they can do something to lessen the hardships of the salespeoples' lives.

CONSUMERS' LEAGUE OF ILLINOIS.

CONSUMERS' STANDARD.

Children.—A standard house is one in which no child is allowed to work after six o'clock in the evening, and the requirements of the child-labor law are all complied with.

Wages.—A standard house is one in which equal pay is given for work of equal value, irrespective of sex. In the departments where women only are employed the minimum wages are \$6 per week for adult workers of six months' experience, and fall in few instances below \$8.

In which wages are paid weekly or fortnightly.

In which fines, if imposed, are paid into a fund for the benefit of the employés.

In which the minimum wages of cash girls and boys are \$2.25 per week, with the same conditions regarding weekly payments and fines.

Hours.—A standard house is one in which the hours from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. (with not less than three quarters of an hour for lunch) constitute the working day, and a general half holiday is given on one day of each week during the summer months.

In which a vacation of not less than one week is given, with pay, during the summer season to employés of six months' standing.

In which all overtime is compensated for.

Physical conditions.—A standard house is one in which work-, lunch-, and retiring rooms are apart from each other and are in good sanitary condition.

In which seats are provided for saleswomen and the use of seats permitted.

Other conditions.—A standard house is one in which humane and considerate behavior toward employés is the rule.

In which fidelity and length of service meet with the consideration which is their due.

It is a comparatively easy matter to enlist the sympathy of intelligent and educated people, and through them reform must be brought about. The great body of buyers who regularly patronize the cheap stores will take no interest in the matter. Some may feel that they have done their duty when they cease buying at stores where evils exist; but that is a dwarfed conception of social obligation. We should not rest until the bad stores improve or go out of business.

ANNIE MARION MACLEAN.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO.